United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/134

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 December 2018
English
Original: Spanish

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third session
11–22 March 2016
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by CHIRAPAQ – Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

18-20391 (E) 181218 191218

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Statement

Social protection and access to relevant services for the empowerment of indigenous women and girls in the Americas

Given their comprehensive nature, the Sustainable Development Goals provide a favourable context within which to respond to the needs and requirements of indigenous women and girls in terms of access to public services and social protection. Nonetheless, as far as we are concerned, the major challenge is how to link the broad scope of those goals with the existing international legal framework concerning the rights of indigenous women and peoples, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), General Assembly resolution 69/2 and recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, and of the Cairo+20 and Beijing+20 mechanisms.

In this statement, we shall focus on the relevance of basic services and social protection to indigenous peoples and women and, in particular, challenges regarding access to them in the context of migration to urban centres, and on access to justice, especially for indigenous women rights defenders.

Challenges relating to the relevance of services and social protection to indigenous peoples and women

Among the greatest obstacles we face as indigenous women and girls in gaining access to health care and education are the remoteness and isolation of our communities and the limited knowledge that medical and education professionals have of our languages and cultures. The Permanent Forum, therefore, has always maintained that, under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and General Assembly resolution 69/2, we have the right to participate fully in the development and setting of policies and programmes guaranteeing our right to development.

Although the gaps in access to education and health-care services have shrunk in much of the region, they persist between indigenous and non-indigenous women, largely owing to a lack of quality or culturally relevant services. Figures for maternal health provide a clear example. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, while the national average of maternal deaths among the non-indigenous population of Honduras is 147 deaths per 100,000 live births, that figure rises to as many as 255 in areas more heavily populated by indigenous people.

A study conducted in 2017 by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre showed that 69.6 per cent of young indigenous women between 15 and 19 years of age in rural areas of Brazil had completed primary education, compared with 92 per cent of their non-indigenous counterparts. In Peru, data from the National Institute of Statistics and Information Technology highlight that 31.6 per cent of rural indigenous girls aged from 12 to 16 years attending secondary school are behind their age group.

In a similar vein, conditional cash transfer programmes and food assistance often have limited cultural relevance, contribute to the breakdown of the social fabric, lead to an increase in the overall workload for indigenous women and are

distinguished by a lack of shared social responsibility between the authorities and the indigenous women and families themselves. Those issues are evident in the Juntos and Qali Warma programmes in Peru.

Moreover, when we talk about access to health-care services, we indigenous women are not only beneficiaries. We are also providers of physical, emotional and spiritual care in our communities. Nonetheless, government authorities often look askance at the contribution of our ancestral knowledge and practices, as in the case of midwives, and apply Western approaches as the standard for assessing and rejecting all the others.

Social protection and access to services in the context of migration

It is commonly believed that we indigenous women live only in rural areas. In fact, half live in urban areas, often because of forced migration resulting from the impact of the agroindustry, extractive industries, armed conflict, environmental violence, climate change and the very absence of services and opportunities in our territories.

In urban areas, we find ourselves in a hostile, discriminatory and racist environment in which many of us end up in informal employment and completely excluded from access to basic services and social protection.

A high percentage of indigenous women and girls who migrate are employed as domestic workers, an extremely precarious sector in which labour rights are highly susceptible to violation. In Mexico, for example, 90 per cent of all domestic workers are women, among whom the number of indigenous women doubles or even triples that of their non-indigenous counterparts in urban areas.

Access to justice and indigenous women rights defenders

On the subject of access to justice for indigenous women, we are confronted by numerous obstacles arising from the many types of discrimination from which we suffer. They include: cultural, linguistic and economic barriers; the persistent racism and male chauvinism of public officials; the scarce presence of public institutions in remote areas and the disconnect between the mainstream and customary justice systems.

Access to justice is especially limited in cases where indigenous women defenders of human and territorial rights face criminal charges, as they are perceived as a threat to the economic interests and the very sovereignty of States.

We wish to call to mind our sister Juana Raymundo, a young Ixil Mayan rights defender who was assassinated in July. Her body was found with signs of torture, adding to the long list of cases of State impunity.

In view of the foregoing, we urge States and the United Nations system to implement the following recommendations with respect for our right to self-determination, our free, prior and informed consent and our full and effective participation:

- Combat racism and discrimination by training and raising the awareness of public officials, especially in the justice system and education and health-care sectors, and promote the training and inclusion of indigenous women professionals.

- Invest the necessary resources to collect, disaggregate and analyse existing data and use them in the design of truly gender-sensitive and culturally relevant policies and programmes for the provision of services and social protection.
- Promote and support sustainable, rights-based opportunities for job creation and economic development that are relevant to indigenous women living in rural settings and situations of urban migration and in which our knowledge is recognized and social protection mechanisms are ensured.
- Conduct studies focusing on the social, economic and cultural impact of conditional cash transfer programmes on the lives of indigenous women and girls.
- Design and implement comprehensive policies to protect defenders of human and territorial rights, including specific measures for indigenous women rights defenders.
- Promote the establishment of specific State institutions for indigenous women and girls that are representative and responsive to our realities and needs and sufficiently well funded from budget resources to ensure their effectiveness.

The full empowerment of indigenous women and girls will be possible only to the extent that States come to view public services and social protection as fundamental rights rather than favours done to beneficiaries.